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HOUSE PROPERTY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT ON OCTAVIA HILL LINES.

THOSE who have studied the ideas and ideals which lie behind the life and work of Octavia Hill—and have added to their knowledge of them in the light of the recently published Letters*—are bound to acknowledge that her housing work was prompted by a very definite desire for social improvement *for* (not necessarily *of*) the people. Its conception was as Social Work. The student finds himself further impressed by the evidence that such a conception was due to the intensely practical and businesslike trend of the mind which originated it, and a closer examination of the business methods which Miss Hill adopted brings further evidence of this important balancing influence. Fundamentally, as shown by the whole history of all trade and commerce, sound business rests on social needs, and I have always maintained, in emphasising the business side of Octavia Hill housing management, that we can show no greater social service in any generation than that of a good business run well. In practice the house-property manager becomes a part of the business life of her country. She is a house agent, though not an ordinary one, for she has decided on definite principles of work which are not usually considered an essential part of the business, and has a definite social aim—the eradication and prevention of “Slumdom.” There is much, therefore, in Miss Hill’s work that brings it in touch with the later Social Welfare movement which is now developing in business generally and with the institution of

* “Octavia Hill: Early Ideals.” George Allen & Unwin, 7/6.

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Rotary Club ideas ; but her housing work stands out markedly in its early practical recognition of the importance of the human economic factors in the business, and in the right adjustment of these with the natural and social (see Sir Josiah Stamp's Beckley Lecture, "The Christian Ethic as an Economic Factor"). Briefly, her contribution to the business life of the country has been to adjust the balance of all the economic factors which enter into house property management and to expose the Slum as bad business.

The work began in 1864 with the purchase by Ruskin of three tenement houses in Marylebone. The work in London grew so that in 1912 (the year of her death) Miss Hill directly controlled between 1,800 and 1,900 houses and flats, exclusive of rooms in tenement houses which might be considered as separate dwellings. Of these the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were the owners of the greater part, owning some 1,600. Roughly calculated, the annual rental controlled in London then came to something fairly high up in the ten thousands. From 1912 to 1916 the growth of the work continued at about the same pace as in Miss Hill's lifetime. During her lifetime it had spread to Edinburgh, Manchester, Dundee, Glasgow and other British towns. An Octavia Hill Association was established in Philadelphia (U.S.A.) and is still working. In Holland there is a considerable following, and for some time many ladies came from Holland to be trained. Sweden sent two workers for training, and social workers from Russia, Italy, and other countries came to Miss Hill for consultation. To appraise this growth of the work we must remember the social conditions of the time. In the middle of the last century sanitation had only just begun its organisation, Miss Hill's grandfather, Dr. Southwood Smith, being one of its most prominent leaders. Education was neither compulsory nor free. Popular places of amusement were few, and scarcely touched the poorer classes. The need for open spaces and public playgrounds was hardly realised. Miss Hill had to face such defects in social organisation as part of her housing problem. Glimpses of her splendid wrestling with the many evils of the times are given in her "Homes of the London Poor" and her annual letters (from 1872) to her fellow-workers. The relief organised in connection

with her tenants led to her association with, and the development of, the C.O.S. The necessity in the lives of the tenants for the uplifting power of some glimpse of beauty and art was the beginning of the Kyrle Society, for which her sister, Miss Miranda Hill, did so much. The excursions and holidays planned and arranged on the tenants' behalf, and the lack in their surroundings of any of the softening influences of Nature, planted the seed from which grew the work of the Commons Preservation Society and the National Trust. The improvement in general social conditions enables to-day's workers to undertake the management of larger estates with no larger expenditure of energy and with much more promise of social success than was possible for Miss Hill, although financially there are factors at work which upset the former general economic position.

In 1916 a much greater development of the work than was then foreseen began, which in five years time more than doubled the rental controlled by Miss Hill. In that year the Commissioners of Crown Lands (then of Woods and Forests) decided to place certain houses coming to them at the termination of leases under my control. The work began with one tenement house and only a small weekly collection. Within six or seven years the houses in charge were 850, covering an approximate area of 50 acres with 2,000 tenancies of a mixed character and a population of about 8,000. During the time covering this allocation to Octavia Hill Management small house leasehold property was also falling in on the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' Estates. This was placed in charge of the workers in the various local centres already established, adding again very considerably to the rental in charge and to the number of houses and people on Octavia Hill managed property.

The most marked development (and in my opinion the most important) of later years has been the addition of municipal work since 1926. This is almost impossible to measure, because new property is constantly being added, but a rough estimate shows that the figures of the previous ten years in tenancies are more than doubled. My own connection with this development has been so considerable (the Crown Estate has supplied up to January 1929 eleven of the present fifteen provincial municipal workers and five of the seven Managers) as to be almost

overwhelming, and the following list of towns whose needs have been supplied from my office may be of interest :—

CHESTERFIELD	Manager
	Assistant Manager
STOCKTON-ON-TEES	Manager (the Assistant Manager at Chesterfield was promoted to this post)
	Assistant Manager (the first in 1927)
	Assistant Manager (the second in 1928)
WALSALL	Assistant Manager
ROTHERHAM	Manager
	Two Assistant Managers
SCARBOROUGH	Manager (the first Assistant Manager at Stockton was promoted to this post)
	Assistant Manager
BEBINGTON U.D.C.	Manager
	Assistant

Octavia Hill workers are also to be found at Chester and West Bromwich.

There are three *municipal* workers in London who were trained in Octavia Hill methods, and of these, two—those working for the St. Pancras Borough Council on part of a condemned area—were trained in my office. The other worker, who had long experience with Miss Hill, is well known in Kensington.

During this same period also, following the splendid lead given by Father Jellicoe in the St. Pancras House Improvement Society, there was an increasingly rapid demand for Managers of the Public Utility Societies established in London and elsewhere, mainly to supply the need of those who cannot pay the rents of the municipal houses, but also with a view to speeding up the supply of much-needed houses generally. Four of these Managers (including the St. Pancras House Improvement Society and the Birmingham C.O.P.E.C. House Improvement Society) are workers trained in the Crown office.

The growing need for technical training by actual experience of work on the estates, and the more rapid acquirement of legal and general commercial knowledge by special study, had already been foreseen, but the difficulties of establishing an agreed form of training had resulted in my separation from the main body of workers and the establishment of a centre of my own. From that centre, in conjunction with the newly-established College of Estate Management, the first three women surveyors became professionally qualified. The theory of my training has been that Octavia Hill workers have to add their own special personal and social qualifications in the work of Management to all that is best technically in general practice. We must be nothing less technically because we may mean so much more socially—indeed, we cannot be what we should be socially unless we work with technical knowledge. On the technical side the Surveyors' Institute standard is now generally adopted, but it has not been possible in the rapid demand for workers during the last two years always to add the surveyor's professional qualification to the others the workers possess. The Managers appointed, whether qualified as surveyors or not, have, however, all been university women capable of grasping an intensive practical course, and selected for training on account of their suitable personality and previous education.

It is important that in the establishment of so many new centres of work the principles and ideals so prominent in Miss Hill's work should be firmly grasped and maintained by her followers. One of the obituary notices (*The Commonwealth*) says of Miss Hill: "She laid fast hold of some life-giving principles, and worked them out to the end." This is true. In following her work certain principles become strikingly evident. One sees everywhere—

(1) Her emphasis on the importance of individual character.
 (2) (Perhaps as a corollary) her belief in the force of personal influence.

(3) Her acceptance of the home as the centre of social well-being.

These principles account for the methods adopted in her management and for her insistence in considering houses and people together.

The pivot of the work is the personal collection of the rents in the homes by educated, trained women. Women are the agents, because the business of the house—especially with the working classes—is usually in the hands of the woman. There is a sense in which management of the houses may be regarded as a natural development of the management of a house. The houses are so grouped in “collections” that the collector is able to enter each house, obtain the money, sign the book, make notes of repairs needed, hear complaints made, and so set the mutual obligations of landlord and tenant on a thoroughly human and friendly basis. The importance of this part of the work cannot be too widely emphasised, but it has unfortunately led to the use of the term “Rent Collector” as descriptive of the worker. The work is so much more than the mere collection of rents that the term is undesirable, leading to a false conception of our responsibilities and misconceptions of our standards. Our work is threefold :—

(a) Social, establishing relationship with our tenants, helping them to deal with their difficulties, and watching over their general welfare.

(b) Financial, dealing with rents, rates, taxes, payment of accounts, etc.

(c) Structural, providing for the use, upkeep and repair of the buildings.

For obtaining an insight into life other than that of our own narrow circle this work has, I think, special advantages over what is more definitely social work—

(1) we are receivers rather than donors, and the attitude towards us is therefore different ;

(2) we see *all* conditions of homes and people ; not specially bad or specially good selected cases.

In connection with our relationship with the people I always like to remember what Carlyle wrote to Ruskin of Miss Hill. He is writing of his interest in hearing of her work, and writes of her as “ taking infinite pains to tell them (the tenants) no lies.” Of the evils of equivocation—which so easily slip into all our relations in life—and of untruth anywhere, there could be no more scornful denunciator than Miss Hill, and experience proves

there is nothing so effective in one’s dealing with working people as absolute sincerity.

Miss Hill never laid down any hard and fast rules of method, but among the practices on her estates which stand out as specially helpful are the following :—

(1) Prompt dealing with arrears. Two weeks’ rent missing without a satisfactory explanation means immediate inquiry. It may mean notice to quit.

(2) The careful selection and establishment of reliable caretakers where necessary. This maintains order and safeguards against bribery, to which caretakers of popular estates have many temptations.

(3) The careful taking up of references and a visit to the home of every applicant for tenancy. On this rests refusal or acceptance, and it also acts against too great power being left in the hands of an official untrained in studying social effects and apt to be readily influenced by smaller issues.

(4) The judicious placing of tenants according to the size and ages of the family and the standard of the home.

(5) The use of rules, but these always of a kind which can, when necessary, be enforced.

Modern conditions have enforced some modifications in the practical application of these principles, but their influence in guiding a Manager’s course is always evident, and there is no doubt that, had they been more generally understood and appreciated at the beginning of our post-war housing enterprises, some considerable trouble and difficulty in management might have been saved. The encountering of difficulty has, however, led to a much wider spread knowledge and understanding of the work of management. This must work for the general good.

One danger has revealed itself in the new developments. It is the idea that the social economic factors can be separated from the other factors in the work and the same results attained. It is sometimes believed that the work can be done as Social Welfare work only. Examination shows that Miss Hill’s success was due to the perfect blending of all features of the work, and to the government of each section of administration by the same spirit.

The Octavia Hill Club, instituted specially to keep all those who have worked in my office in touch with one another, started the life of its quarterly publication with Miss Hill's own wish for the future of her work. I will quote it again and leave it to speak for itself :—

“ When I am gone I hope my friends will not try to carry out any special system, or to follow blindly in the track which I have trodden. New circumstances require various efforts ; and it is the spirit, not the dead form, that should be perpetuated. When the time comes that we slip from our places and they are called to the front as leaders, what should they inherit from us ? Not a system, not an association, not dead formulas, not any tangible thing, however great, not any memory, however good, but the quick eye to see, the true soul to measure, the large hope to grasp the mighty issues of new and better days to come.”

M. M. JEFFERY.

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CHARITY ORGANISATION SOCIETY,
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